

# Flu Season Preparedness

By Capt. Carolyn Congleton

So much of the news today is about Asian avian flu that we tend to forget the reality of our common, annual influenza outbreak. Epidemics of flu usually occur during our winter months, and are responsible for about 36,000 deaths a year in the United States. Now is the time to reduce your risk of getting this highly infectious disease by being vaccinated. A new form of flu vaccine, FluMist™, is a nasal spray that will be initially offered to those deploying and some hospital care-givers. FluMist, however, may not be the appropriate choice of prevention for everyone.

Highest risk for flu include those individuals 65 and older, children 6 to 23 months, pregnant women, those who are immunocompromised, and people with certain chronic medical conditions. Chronic conditions include diabetes, asthma, cardiopulmonary disorders (other than hypertension), renal dysfunction, and people on chemotherapy. High risk individuals will receive a notice in the mail regarding vaccination. Vaccinations are scheduled to begin October or early November depending on when the Medical Group receives shipments.

Frequent hand washing is a simple key to prevention. Flu virus is transmitted from person to person primarily by coughing and sneezing. Remember to cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Touching surfaces like doorknobs or telephones is a common mode of transmission. Adults can be infectious from one day before symptoms appear through five days after onset of symptoms. Children can be infectious for ten or more days, and immunocompromised individuals for weeks or months.

Symptoms of the flu include abrupt onset of fever, muscle ache, headache, malaise, cough, sore throat, and runny nose. Children often acquire middle ear infection, nausea, and vomiting as well.

All beneficiaries of Wright-Patterson Medical Center will be offered flu shots this year. Unfortunately, due to current homeland defense requirements, civilian employees who are not beneficiaries will not be offered flu shots until 70 percent of the active duty population is immunized. Since this may occur late in the season, civilian employees are encouraged check with their chosen health plan and to seek flu shots from their regular physician, especially if they are high-risk.

The immunization clinic is located on the first floor of the hospital and is open from 7:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday for walk-in immunizations. In addition, immunology staff will be arranging to give flu shots at active duty squadrons and the commissary. Call (937) 904-3588 or check our website, <http://wpmc1.wpafb.af.mil> for the flu shot schedule and vaccine availability.